



Gender equality in rural development: importance of women underlined

Gender equality in rural areas is set to become a major point on the Commission's rural development agenda following the conclusions adopted at the end of an open debate at the May Agriculture Council (1). Member States highlighted the importance of women in agriculture, their contribution to the multifunctional aspects of European agriculture and the importance of supporting rural women under the rural development initiatives of the common agricultural policy's (CAP) so-called second pillar.

Although 37 % of the agricultural workforce in the EU is female, 'farming is still regarded as a man's world' (2). Statistics presented by Member States show, for example, that in Portugal, an estimated 60 % of farms under five hectares are managed by women, and in Finland nearly half the rural workforce is female. Despite this, men remain the chief beneficiaries of production aid from structural funds. This clearly demonstrates a need to support and raise women's profile in the decision-making process. One way to reduce discrimination, concluded the Council, would be for Member States to break down their statistical information systems by gender. For women to play a key role in rural development strategy, and to ensure the equal distribution of resources, it means undertaking adequate analyses of the potential repercussions on gender equality prior to implementing new programmes.

Although current EU initiatives such as Leader+ already contribute to raising rural women's profile (women are regarded as a priority in this programme), still more can be done to develop, and encourage their participation in, women's organisations in rural areas. Through 'concrete actions' such as these we will strengthen women's position in the rural economy, concluded the Council. 'The rural development policy offers ample opportunity for Member States to include such actions in their programmes.'

Member States must 'strengthen gender perspective', says Franz Fischler. Gender equality must be put at the centre of EU rural development policy. This means

supporting policies that promote the role of women in the economy, and reducing the level of female unemployment in rural areas. Despite many measures already being put in place to create additional work in rural tourism, processing and marketing of rural products, and in connection with the introduction of rural technologies, this remains a significant problem. Further efforts are also needed to provide the necessary training in these skills.

Fighting unemployment does not just mean the creation of new jobs, say Member States. It goes hand in hand with the improvement of overall living conditions in rural areas and the creation of an adequate support network of rural services. Public transport infrastructures need to be improved in rural areas, as does the availability of facilities such as childcare. It is through integrated actions that we can improve the standing of women in the rural economy. Continuing this discussion, Commissioner Fischler will attend the third international conference on women to be held in October in Madrid.

EU citizens support CAP objectives

More than 60 % of EU citizens see a shift of farm subsidies from production to directly supporting farmers and the rural areas as positive, according to the latest Eurobarometer opinion poll (3). Support among those questioned on direct payments to farmers was on average 62 %, up 6 % compared to the Eurobarometer of mid-2001.

The survey shows that citizens want EU farm policy to ensure that agricultural products are healthy and safe. It is also the area in which the CAP is seen to be most successful, with a small increase — from 37 % (2001) to 42 % — in the number of respondents who felt that the CAP ensured that agricultural produce was safe to eat. Only 20 % of respondents, however, felt that they had enough information on how food is produced and treated.

(1) For the full press release see Memo/02/113 of 28 May 2002.

(2) Report on 2428th session of the Agriculture Council SI(2002) 608/2 of 30 May 2002.

(3) Full report on the agricultural aspects available on the web site of the Directorate-General for Agriculture (<http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/survey/index.htm>).

Those surveyed were strongly in favour of the 13 policy objectives listed in the survey:

	(%)
To ensure that agricultural products are healthy and safe	90
To promote respect for the environment	88
To protect medium or small-sized farms	81
To help farmers to adapt their production to consumer expectations	80
To favour and improve life in the countryside	77
To make European agriculture more competitive on world markets	77
To ensure stable and adequate incomes for farmers	77
To encourage the diversification of agricultural products and activities	73
To protect the taste of European agricultural products	73
To protect the specificity of European agricultural products	73
To favour methods of organic production	72
To reduce development disparities between regions	72
To defend farmers' interests in their dealings with intermediaries and distributors	71

This continues the trend since 2000 ⁽¹⁾. When asked how well they thought the CAP met its objectives, the satisfaction levels ranged from 41 % (to ensure that agricultural products are healthy and safe) to 25 % (to defend farmers' interests in their dealings with intermediaries and distributors). Lack of information continues to be a problem — 'Don't know' answers ranged from 24–35 %.

Eurobarometer surveys are carried out twice a year for the European Commission. The survey in March and April 2002 again included four questions on agriculture. A total of 16 041 people were polled in the 15 Member States.

⁽¹⁾ See 'Flash' Eurobarometers 85 and 86, also at the above address.

News in brief

□ Potato starch quota system to be extended

A proposal to extend the current quota for the production of potato starch in the eight producing Member States for three further marketing years (2002/03, 2003/04, 2004/05) was also adopted at May's Agricultural Council ⁽¹⁾. This will entitle potato growers to be paid a compensatory payment of EUR 110.54 per tonne of starch contained in potatoes delivered to potato starch manufacturers, while manufacturers will receive EUR 22.25 per tonne provided they pay producers a minimum price for potatoes destined for starch production; which represents a budget of EUR 234 million if the production arrives at the quota.

Quota allocation will remain the same, Germany and the Netherlands receiving almost two thirds of the total European Union annual quota of 1 762 148 tonnes. However, the Commission must submit a report on quota allocation to the Council by September 2004, together with appropriate proposals which will take account of possible changes in the cereal and potato starch markets. This report will form the basis for future Council decisions on quota allocation.

□ New publication: *Agriculture — the spotlight on women*

In conjunction with Eurostat, DG Agriculture has this month published a new brochure entitled *Agriculture — the spotlight on women*. This publication aims to highlight the important role played by women on agricultural holdings and in rural development from a statistical point of view, and gives examples of the diverse activities undertaken by women in agriculture, both in existing Member States and in some of the candidate countries ⁽²⁾.

⁽¹⁾ Council Regulation (EC) No 962/2002 of 27 May 2002.

⁽²⁾ Currently available in EN, FR and ES (catalogue No KF-40-01-383-EN-C). DE and IT versions to follow. Also available on the Agriculture DG website at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/publi/women/spotlight/text_en.pdf. See also the Eurostat website: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/eurostat/Public/dashop/print-catalogue/EN?catalogue=Eurostat>



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